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ABSTRACT

The shared writing program described in this lesson engages K-2 students in thinking about the process of learning and the behavioral and community needs which support a productive classroom environment. During the two 30-minute lessons, students will: participate in group discussions about learning; identify and agree on classroom goals and needs; and refer to established goals on a long-term basis in a variety of ongoing classroom events and activities. The instructional plan, a 36-item book list, web resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. (PM)

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Creating Class Rules: A Beginning to Creating Community

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Grade Band

K-2

Estimated Lesson Time

Two 30-minute sessions

Overview

This is a simple shared-writing activity which can establish a foundation for *ongoing* community-building in the classroom. It engages students in thinking about the process of learning and the behavioral and community needs which support a productive classroom environment. At the beginning of the school year, students are led through a discussion designed to establish goals and needs for the classroom. Their ideas are charted on two lists: "Why Are We Here?" and "What We Need." These two charts become the classroom rules, to be returned to often throught the year as needs change. This activity encourages students to become contributing, consensus-building members of their classrooms.

From Theory to Practice

A classroom is a community in which students can learn to solve social problems in ways that include their own needs and experiences. Critical-thinking skills are an important part of the social-relationship building that leads to productive classroom communities as well as long-term benefits of interpersonal skills.

Giving students the opportunity to provide input on classroom goals and expectations helps them become productive participants in community building and may help increase their intellectual as well as social development. In *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community,* Alfie Kohn contrasts the idea of controlling students' behavior with an approach where students work together to create caring classroom communities. The underlying premise is that complying with someone else's expectations for how to act fails to help students develop socially or morally.

In his article "Creating a School Community," Eric Schaps discusses the long-term benefits of building a sense of community in schools, including its relation to academic and behavioral growth as well as personal responsibility.

Kohn, Alfie. 1996. *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Schaps, Eric. 2003. "Creating a School Community." *Educational Leadership* 60 (March): 31–33.

Further Reading

Kreidler, William J., and James Graham Hale. 1999. *Teaching Conflict Resolution through Children's Literature (Grades K–2).* New York: Scholastic Professional Books.

Student Objectives

Students will

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- participate in group discussions about learning.
- identify and agree on classroom goals and needs.
- refer to established goals on a long-term basis in a variety of ongoing classroom events and activities.

Resources

- Book List

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Chart paper and colored markers
- List of books about friends, relationships, and community
- NCTE Elementary Cyberbrief: Social Reality in the Classroom

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Gather students together for discussion. Have them brainstorm some ideas about why they come to school, using as many leading questions as necessary (e.g., "Why are we here?" "What do we do at school?" "Do you enjoy being with friends at school?"). Be sure to lead students into addressing the social as well as academic aspects of school, such as making friends and learning from other people.
2. Put up a chart paper and write, "Why Are We Here?" at the top. Tell students you would like to make a list of their reasons for coming to school. Using the prompt, "Why are we here?" make a list of students' responses on the chart. If students suggest something that is already covered by a list item, stop and talk about the items; you want to avoid having a list that is extremely long and overly complex. A workable list might have as many as ten items listed. Make sure that the list includes both academic and social purposes for coming to school.
3. Possible student responses may include items such as the following:
    - learn to read
    - write stories
    - make friends
    - share with others
4. When the list is complete, review and talk about each item. Make a last call for anything that might be missing from the list. If students have not included "fun" somewhere on the list, you might want to add it on as your contribution. Inform students that they will be using the list the next day to help them think about what we all need to do inside and outside the classroom to make sure we accomplish all the things on the chart.

Session Two

1. Gather students together for discussion. Review the list of items on the chart from Session One. Have a short discussion about what you might see students doing in a classroom where everyone is able to learn.
2. Put up a second chart paper next to the first one. Write "What Do We Need?" at the top. Have students read the first item on yesterday's chart, and ask what they will need to do in order to achieve that goal. For example, if the first item is "read books," you might ask them what the classroom needs to sound like if people want to be reading, or what people would be doing if they

were sitting close to someone who is trying to read. Since the goal is to have students create the expectations, leading questions should only be used if students are having a hard time understanding what they are being asked to do.

3. Refer to each item on the first chart to help students create the second chart. There will not be a one-to-one correlation of items from chart to chart; rather, you will want to make sure that enough needs are listed to support all items on the first chart.
4. When both charts are complete, have students read each item aloud, either in turn or as a group. Ask for a last call for anything that might be missing from either chart.
5. Post both charts in a visible area. These two charts will become the official "classroom guidelines," to be returned to periodically throughout the year as situations arise that call for different "needs" to meet expanding goals.

Variations and Extensions

- Focus the "guidelines" on specific areas in the classroom, for example the reading corner or the computer area. Students could brainstorm (with some teacher guidance) what would be appropriate use of the computer(s), especially if the number of terminals is limited.
- Have students who give suggestions do the actual chart writing. If spelling is an issue, the charts can be proofread and rewritten on another day before posting them on the wall.
- For older students, use "Where Do We Want To Go?" and "How Do We Get There?" as the brainstorm prompts.
- Use the charts as resources to support classroom meetings in which social conflicts are addressed.

Web Resources

NCTE Elementary Cyberbrief
http://www.ncte.org/elem/Cyberbriefs/social_reality_inthe_classroom.shtml
This article provides some background on the evolution of this lesson.
Creating a School Community
http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200303/schaps.html
This article by Eric Schaps discusses the long-term benefits of creating a caring classroom community.

Student Assessment/Reflections

This activity isn't necessarily graded, but anecdotal evidence may be used to reinforce the value of the official documents the class has created. These could include

- teacher observation of student participation in the initial group discussions.
- ongoing student reference and suggested additions/revisions to information on both charts.
- student participation in classroom meetings or discussions which address student learning needs.
- student reflective writing (journals, problem reports, etc.) which refer to chart information.

NCTE/IRA Standards

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Books about Friends, Relationships, Community

Amazing Grace. 1999. Mary Hoffman. Scott Foresman.

And to Think That We Thought We'd Never Be Friends. 1999. Mary Ann Hoberman. Crown Publishing.

Chester's Way. 1997. Kevin Henkes. Mulberry Books.

Chrysanthemum. 1996. Kevin Henkes. Mulberry Books.

Cook-A-Doodle-Doo! 1999. Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel. Harcourt.

Elbert's Bad Word. 1996. Audrey Wood. Voyager Books.

Enemy Pie. 2000. Derek Munson. Chronicle Books.

Friends. 1997. Helme Heine. Aladdin Library.

Good Luck Mrs. K! 1999. Louise Borden. Margaret McElderry.

Horace and Morris But Mostly Dolores. 2003. James Howe. Aladdin.

Hooway for Wodney Wat. 1999. Helen Lester. Houghton Mifflin.

How to Lose All Your Friends. 1997. Nancy Carlson. Puffin.

Humble Pie. 2000. Jennifer Donnelly. Atheneum.

I Like the Way You Are. 2000. Eve Bunting. Houghton Mifflin.

If I Were in Charge of the World. 1984. Judith Viorst. Scott Foresman.

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse. 1996. Kevin Henkes. Greenwillow.

Lottie's New Friend. 1999. Petra Mathers. Atheneum.

Me First. 1995. Helen Lester. Houghton Mifflin.

Mr. Lincoln's Way. 2001. Patricia Polacco. Philomel Books.

My Name Is Jorge. 1999. Jane Medina. Boyds Mills Press.

The Name Jar. 2001. Yangsook Choi. Knopf.

No, David! 1998. David Shannon. Scholastic.

Old Henry. 1990. Joan W. Blos. Mulberry Books.

The Other Side. 2001. Jacqueline Woodson. Putnam Publishing Group.

Owen. 1993. Kevin Henkes. Greenwillow.

The Quarelling Book. 1982. Charlotte Zolotow. Harper Trophy.

Ribbon Rescue. 2002. Robert Munsch. Cartwheel Books.

Stella Louella's Runaway Book. 1988. Lisa Campbell Ernst. Simon & Schuster.

Stephanie's Ponytail. 1996. Robert Munsch. Annick Press.

Thank You Mr. Falker. 1998. Patricia Polacco. Philomel Books.

Wemberly Worried. 2000. Kevin Henkes. Greenwillow.

What if Everybody Did That? 1990. Ellen Javernick. Children's Press.

When Sophie Gets Angry - Really, Really Angry. 1999. Molly Bang. Scholastic.

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge. 1989. Mem Fox. Scott Foresman.

Yo, Yes! 1998. Chris Raschka. Orchard Books.

Zelda and Ivy and the Boy Next Door. 1999. Laura McGee Kvasnosky. Candlewick Press.

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Yo, Yes! 1998. Chris Raschka. Orchard Books.

Zelda and Ivy and the Boy Next Door. 1999. Laura McGee Kvasnosky. Candlewick Press.

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